

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claim 1 (Currently Amended): A method of improving a thermal stability for cobalt salicide, comprising:

- providing a substrate having a silicon layer thereon;
- forming a cobalt layer over the silicon layer;
- forming a TiN_x layer over the cobalt layer;
- performing a first thermal process to form a cobalt salicide layer over the silicon layer,

the performing of the first thermal process ~~including~~ including:

- diffusing cobalt into the silicon layer to form the cobalt salicide ~~layer and~~
- layer;
- diffusing nitrogen in the TiN_x layer into the cobalt salicide layer; and
- minimizing a diffusion of the Ti from the TiN_x layer into the silicon layer; and
- removing a non-reactive cobalt layer,

wherein the TiN_x layer includes x atoms of nitrogen for each atom of titanium in a TiN_x molecule, and a value of x is greater than 0.9.

Claim 2 (Original): The method of claim 1, further comprising:

- performing a second thermal process,

wherein the second thermal process is performed after the removing of the non-reactive cobalt layer.

Claim 3 (Original): The method of claim 1, wherein the TiN_x layer is formed by a sputtering process.

Claim 4 (Original): The method of claim 3, wherein a gas used in the sputtering process comprises N_2 and Ar.

Claim 5 (Original): The method of claim 4, wherein a ratio of N_2 to Ar in the gas used in the sputtering process is approximately 3:1.

Claim 6 (Original): The method of claim 1, wherein the TiN_x layer is formed to a thickness in a range of approximately 25 angstroms to approximately 100 angstroms.

Claim 7 (Currently Amended): A method of forming cobalt salicide, comprising:

- providing a layer of silicon;
- forming a layer of cobalt over the layer of silicon;
- forming a layer of TiN_x over the layer of cobalt, wherein a value of x is greater than 0.9; and
- performing a first thermal process to form a layer of cobalt salicide over the layer of silicon, the performing of the first thermal process ~~including~~ including:
 - diffusing cobalt into the silicon layer to form the layer of cobalt salicide and
 - diffusing nitrogen in the TiN_x layer into the cobalt salicide layer; and
 - minimizing a diffusion of the Ti from the TiN_x layer into the silicon layer.

Claim 8 (Original): The method of claim 7, further comprising:

- removing a layer of non-reactive cobalt; and
- performing a second thermal process, the second thermal process being performed to decrease a resistance of cobalt salicide formed in the performing of the first thermal process.

Claim 9 (Original): The method of claim 7, wherein the forming of the layer of TiN_x is by a sputtering process.

Claim 10 (Original): The method of claim 9, wherein the sputtering process is accomplished with a gas comprised of N_2 and Ar.

Claim 11 (Original): The method of claim 10, wherein the ratio of N_2 to Ar in the gas comprised of N_2 and Ar is approximately 3:1.

Claim 12 (Original): The method of claim 1, wherein the TiN_x layer is formed to a thickness in a range of approximately 25 angstroms to approximately 100 angstroms.

Claim 13 (Currently Amended): A method for forming cobalt salicide having improved thermal stability, comprising:

- providing a silicon layer, the silicon layer being one of a substrate formed of silicon and a layer of silicon formed over a substrate;
- forming a cobalt layer over the silicon layer;
- forming a TiN_x layer over the cobalt layer, wherein a value of x is greater than 0.9;
- performing a first thermal process, the first thermal process including:
 - _____diffusing cobalt into the silicon layer to form a layer of cobalt ~~salicide~~ salicide;
 - and
 - diffusing nitrogen in the TiN_x layer into the layer of cobalt salicide; and
 - minimizing a diffusion of the Ti from the TiN_x layer into the silicon layer;
- removing any unreacted cobalt; and
- performing a second thermal process to reduce a resistance of cobalt salicide formed in the performing of the first thermal process.

Claim 14 (Original): The method of claim 13, wherein the TiN_x layer is formed over the cobalt layer by performing a sputtering process.

Claim 15 (Original): The method of claim 14, wherein the sputtering process is performed with a gas comprising N_2 and Ar.

Claim 16 (Previously Presented): The method of claim 15, wherein the ratio of N_2 to Ar in the gas comprising N_2 and Ar is approximately 3:1.

Claim 17 (Original): The method of claim 13, wherein the TiN_x layer is formed over the cobalt layer to a thickness in a range of approximately 25 angstroms to approximately 100 angstroms.